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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002253

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA TURNS ZIMBABWE AROUND ON LAND SEIZURES

REF: ABUJA 2178

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SUBJECT: Nigeria Turns Zimbabwe Around on Land Seizures

Classified by CDA Andrews. Reason: 1.5(b)

1. (C) Summary: President Obasanjo and Nigeria played the critical role in extracting GOZ commitment to stopping land seizures at the Abuja Ministerial on Zimbabwe September 6. The UK agreed to a "significant financial contribution" to land reform but views that commitment as contingent upon the GOZ keeping its promises. For Nigeria, the Ministerial provided a platform from which to demonstrate its prowess at international statesmanship. HMG will provide further details in London and Washington. The full text of the communique has been faxed to AF/W. End summary.

2. (U) The Commonwealth Ministerial Committee on Zimbabwe (Nigeria, Canada, Jamaica, Kenya, South Africa, the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe) met in Abuja September 6. It agreed that "land is at the core of the crisis in Zimbabwe and cannot be separated from other issues of concern to the Commonwealth, such as the rule of law, respect for human rights, democracy and the economy." The joint communique, agreed among heads of delegation over a very long lunch, called for a "program of land reform...implemented in a fair, just and sustainable manner, in the interest of all the people of Zimbabwe, within the law and constitution of Zimbabwe." The meeting welcomed the "re-affirmation of the United Kingdom's commitment to a significant financial contribution to such a land reform program and its under-taking to encourage other international donors to do the same."

3. (U) Assurances were given by the GOZ that there would "be no further occupation of farm lands;" that it was committed "to the Harare Commonwealth Declaration and the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme;" that it would "speed up the process by which farms that do not meet set criteria are de-listed;" and that "for farms that are not designated, occupiers would be moved to legally acquired lands." The GOZ also agreed to accelerate "discussions with the UNDP, with a view to reaching agreement as quickly as possible,...to restore the rule of law to the process of land reform programme (sic);...to freedom of expression as guaranteed by the Constitution of Zimbabwe and to take firm action against violence and intimidation."

4. (U) The meeting agreed, "that the way forward is for Zimbabwe's international partners:
(a) to engage constructively with the UNDP and the Government of Zimbabwe in pursuing an effective and sustainable land reform programme, on the basis of the UNDP proposals of December 2000;
(b) to respond positively to any request from the Government of Zimbabwe in support of the electoral process; and
(c) to continue to contribute to poverty reduction programmes for the benefit of the people of Zimbabwe and that those partners present (Australia, Canada and United Kingdom), would actively pursue these objectives."

5. (C) Separately, Ambassador Raphael Uwechue, Special Presidential Envoy for Conflict Resolution in Africa, told Charge and Polmiloff September 7 that Nigeria did not define being African by skin color. It was critical to avoid further conflict on the continent, particularly conflict with a racial tinge.

16. (C) According to British High Commission officials here, this was the line President Olusegun Obasanjo took at a September 6 breakfast opening the Ministerial gathering. Nigeria's President also stressed the need for equitable and fair land reform. HMG regretted that Zimbabwean FM Mudenge had not been present to hear Obasanjo's remarks but noted that Foreign Minister Sule Lamido echoed Obasanjo faithfully during the rest of the day. Consensus was achieved on most points at issue. However, Mudenge would not agree to international election observers; the best that could be obtained was the passage in para 4(b), above.

17. (C) According to officials here, HMG is not convinced that Mugabe will carry through on the commitments Mudenge made at Abuja. There is residual unease that the GOZ came to Abuja in order to "avoid a division within the Commonwealth, especially at the forthcoming CHOGM in Brisbane" (joint communique, para 2(d)) and that intimidation and land seizures could resume shortly thereafter (assuming they indeed cease).

18. (C) The British could not have been more pleased with the way Obasanjo handled the event. He brought the GOZ to Abuja and, our British colleagues surmise, worked the phone with Mugabe throughout, to produce a successful ending.

19. (C) Comment: For Nigeria, the positive conclusion to the Ministerial on Zimbabwe demonstrates the prowess of its statesmanship and the fruit of many years of engagement in southern Africa. While the Nigerians do not want to give up on Mugabe (stressing repeatedly during the meeting that the international community has to treat him with "dignity" in order to obtain cooperation), neither can Mugabe easily forget Nigeria's firm support for liberation. The results also demonstrate once again that Obasanjo is a force of his own in foreign policy and on the international stage. Just a week ago, his Foreign Ministry was still espousing a position that demanded far less of Mugabe than what the Commonwealth Ministers extracted (reftel). End comment.

110. (C) Mission has faxed the full text of the communique to the Department (AF/W). Our British interlocutors advise that a thoroughgoing briefing on HMG views, including the thoughts of principals who attended the meeting, can be obtained in London after the return of the UK delegation Friday afternoon, September 7.
Andrews